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LIBERTY AGAINST POWER:

An Introduction To The Traditions Ideas And Promise Of Libertarianism

by Roy Childs

"We now have that systematic theory [of liberty]; we come, fully armed with our knowledge, prepared to bring our message and to capture the imagination of all groups and strands in the population. All other theories and systems have clearly failed: socialism is in retreat everywhere, and notably in Eastern Europe; liberalism has bogged down in a host of insoluable problems; conservatism has nothing to offer but sterile defense of the status quo. Liberty has never been fully tried in the modern world; libertarians now propose to fulfill the American dream of liberty and prosperity for all."

-Murray Rothbard in For A New Liberty

LIBERTY AGAINST POWER:

An Introduction To The Traditions Ideas And Promise Of Libertarianism

by Roy Childs

In the age-old conflict between individual liberty in all of its forms and the political power of the State over the affairs of men, there can be no question which side the Twentieth Century has taken. For the Twentieth Century is the century of Power, a century where State coercion and violence have become commonplace. Every conceivable form of Statism has been tried in this century: Fascism, Communism, Social Democracy, the Corporate State, and military dictatorships.

The fruits of power, too, have become apparent. We have seen more human misery caused by the wielding of political Power, more cruelty and destruction of human lives, than ever before in our history. It is as though all of the terrifying horrors of which human beings are capable, were

rounded up and paraded before our eyes.

If political Power had brought us some great benefit during the course of its reign, if it had solved some of our oldest problems, or indicated a means toward solving others, then perhaps our eyes might justifiably be averted from this spectacle of oppression and slaughter. But there have been no solutions. The hopes awakened by the revolutions against Power, on behalf of Liberty, in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, have been nearly universally abandoned today, and an all-pervading sense of despair seems to have conquered our spirits. On all counts, the political, social and economic problems we face today seem infinitely more complex than those of the last century.

This brief essay represents a portion of the contents and issues explored in Roy Childs' forth-coming book, The Permanent Revolution: Liberty Against Power. It is to be published in early 1976 by FREE LIFE EDITIONS, 41 Union Square West, N.Y., N.Y. 10003.

Roy Childs is one of the best known young libertarian writers. Over the last nine years he has written hundreds of articles and reviews.

In America, crime is increasing, particularly violent crime. Our environment is threatened by pollution; our court system is clogged; our cities are insolvent. The public school system is collapsing. Taxes skyrocket. Masses of regulations, red tape, and bureaucratic edicts are driving small, independent businesses to the wall. The social security system heads towards bankruptcy, pension funds are being squeezed, and the stock market is depressed. We float about in the midst of an inflationary recession, which experts once assured us was impossible, and it now appears that in years to come, energy, jobs, housing and capital goods will all be in short supply. Our foreign policy is in shambles. But we all know that this merely scratches the surface.

Throughout the West, the system of 'corporate statism,' the alliance of elite business, intellectual, and labor interests with the government, is collapsing, unable to solve any of the most fundamental problems. Decades of 'fine tuning' the economic system through political means, through regulations, controls, taxes, spending, privileges and the like, have caused

massive dislocations in the structure of our economic system.

Having pursued Keynesian 'full employment' policies since World War II, the United States has seen its monetary and fiscal manipulations lead to radical swings between bouts of accelerating inflation on the one hand, and ever deeper recessions on the other, with steadily growing unemployment and periods of economic retrogression. The welfare system which we have erected since the 1930's to handle problems of poverty and unemployment, is near collapse. The 'pump priming' of the 1950's and 1960's has led in the 1970's to a flood of dollars which buy less and less. The chickens have indeed come home to roost.

Other nations, too, face similar problems: civil liberties and democracy have been crushed in India, and the rulers of many other countries seem to

be following Indira Gandi's vicious example.

Communist nations still cannot feed their own people. 'Central planning' hasn't worked and the hapless subjects of communist regimes find the course and direction of their lives totally shaped by the State apparatus. Civil liberties and economic freedom are non-existent. Exile or death awaits those heroic souls who protest such tyranny.

The Third World is ruled by a bewildering array of systems, from primitive feudal systems to military dictatorships; it is still utterly stagnant, facing starvation and overpopulation. There is little cause for hope in the policies of their archaic, parasitic political systems, which operate less to bring about real reforms than to preserve the political power of rulers whose barbarism makes us wonder if, indeed, this is the 20th century after all. Latin America consists of systems of violence and corruption, of political bandits preying on the peasants and middle classes alike. African rulers spout high ideals before the court of world opinion but practice petty tyranny, the politics of brutality.

American political and industrial leaders do more than their share to maintain these ruling classes in power. For them, it is business—and politics—as usual, with the indigent peoples and the American tax-payers

paying the price.

We have seen in turn a radical disintegration in international affairs. National currencies fluctuate wildly, as the result of inflation, and the international monetary system grows increasingly unstable. Economic nationalism and protectionism are on the rise, destroying the international system of free trade. Food shortages which result will mean death for countless millions in years to come. Increasingly—in Biafra, the Middle East, Indochina and countless other places—governments resort to the slaughter of warfare.

Most of all, perhaps, personal liberty of all kinds is under attack, the one 'interest' which has no defenders, the one aspect of the 'common good' which is always sacrificed to the interests of Power and Privilege. Liberty to speak, publish, to produce and create, to buy and sell, travel, to live freely, is treated as though it were a luxury which we cannot afford any longer.

If these are not to be considered the fruits of nearly a century of Power, then at least honesty calls upon us to proclaim that Power is everywhere impotent in the face of these problems. It is a plain fact that all of this has occurred in proportion to the growth of government power and that this correlation is no accident. Indeed, it is power itself and its corrupting effects which are the direct cause of most of these problems and is now standing squarely in the way of their solution.

Since the last quarter of the 19th century, we have seen a massive growth in State Power at the expense of what Albert Jay Nock called 'Social Power'—the free actions of individuals in society and their spontaneous generation of institutions to deal with social problems. State power has everywhere been extended to deal with social problems, usually problems resulting directly from earlier interventions into social affairs. And as this State Power grows, Social Power shrinks and the ability of individuals to manage their own affairs and control their own lives is inhibited, obstructed and crushed. As Nock wrote in 1935,

"It is unfortunately none too well understood that, just as the State has no money of its own, so it has no power of its own. All the power it has is what society gives it, plus what it confiscates from time to time on one pretext or another; there is no other source from which State power can be drawn. Therefore every assumption of State Power, whether by gift or seizure, leaves society with so much less power; there is never, nor can be, any strengthening of State power without a corresponding and roughly equivalent depletion of social power."

Such a change means that the control of social problems shifts from the hands of those experiencing the problems to the hands of centralized government authorities. When problems arise, instead of seeing free institutions of vast flexibility and variety spring up to deal with them, adapted to the particular circumstances and facts which individuals face, we find abstract regulations which can only be implemented by the most demeaning and oppressive means. Individuals must increasingly conform and become part of the all-embracing political system in order to survive and function at all. Finding their wealth and power confiscated by the State, individuals find that only by competing in the race for plunder and privilege can they obtain some of the wealth and power in return. They face the alternative of being hammers or anvils, or, to use Albert Camus' phrase,

'victims or executioners.' They invariably find their lives becoming harder, more difficult, more oppressive, and either cease solving their own problems, turning instead to the State apparatus—which then must further expand its power—or else assume passively the role of victims, the role of the exploited and oppressed. Compassion and humanity go by the boards, as alternatives and choices are restricted and tensions and rage build. A form of 'class warfare' results between the State-benefited and the State-oppressed, between the rulers and the ruled.

All of this takes place as the State intervenes in the social affairs of human beings, usurping perogatives of responsibility and choice. Indeed, the exercising of State Power is nothing less than an attempt to subvert the basic fact of people's fundamental responsibility for their own lives, to deliver to some people responsibility for and power over others. Moreover, all government programs exist only at the *expense of production*, of those who produce the goods and services consumed by all in society. This means that we have an ever-greater number of consumers in society who do not produce things which are socially useful—which can be sold on a free market—but still receive incomes extracted from those who do produce. In short, those who produce are robbed for those who do not, contracting the economic base of society and leading to economic parasitism, stagnation and retrogression. Can there be any doubt but that conflict and corruption must inevitably result?

In spite of their ever-growing power, political institutions are impotent to deal with the consequences of their own policies; indeed, these policies merely result in new problems. Minimum wage laws, to prop up the wages of some, cause massive unemployment for teenage minority groups. Subsidies for big business, encourage inefficiency and monopoly power. The printing of money to finance political programs leads to rising prices. Central banking leads to inflationary policies and malinvestments in the economic system. Wage and price controls of all forms lead to shortages and unemployment. Controls on the use and sale of drugs lead to skyrocketing prices, increasing crime, black markets and a proliferation of pushers. Regulatory commissions are used to squelch competition and foster monopoly on behalf of the major businesses in the very industries regulated. Tariffs limit consumer alternatives and raise prices. Compulsory unionism restricts the flexibility and variety of the labor market, fostering inefficiency and stagnation, leading to lower productivity and consequently lower wages.

The uses of State Power to deal with these and other problems are increasingly centered on temporary, ad hoc policies. Solutions offered have no anchor to principles or to consequences. We are offered no fundamental alternatives. Decision-making has been taken away from the people affected and instead is carried out by authorities seeking to advance their own interests. There is, moreover, no debate over principles, issues or policies beyond those which fit cozily into Power's framework.

It is, perhaps, this narrowing of the debate which is most unfortunate, for it blinds us to possible alternatives outside of that narrow and rigid framework. Indeed, in our rush towards the dominance of Power and Privilege over our lives, the fact that there is an alternative system possible to us is being lost amongst the rubble of our civilization. It is a system which has never been fully debated, defended or implemented, but only misunderstood, misrepresented and forgotten, a system which has always had a glorious tradition and rigorous defenders: the simple system of natural liberty. It is that system in which all individuals have the liberty to fully direct the course of their lives unhampered by government interference, to take any actions they wish, so long as they do not aggress against the person or just property of others. It is a system in which Power is taken out of the hands of the State and wealth is left in the hands of individuals who produce it.

Born in the 17th century and continuing to our own time, this tradition had its origins in the great Classical Liberal Revolutions against Power. As

Murray Rothbard has written, it had its origin in

"...(T)he English Revolutions of the 17th century, the American Revolution, and the French Revolution, all of which were necessary to the ushering in of the Industrial Revolution, and of at least partial victories for individual liberty, laissez faire, separation of church-and-state, and international peace. The society of status gave way at least partially to the 'society of contract,' the military society gave way at least partially to the 'industrial society.' The mass of the population now achieved a mobility of labor and place, and accelerating expansion of their living standards, for which they had scarcely dared to hope. Liberalism had indeed brought to the Western World not only liberty, the prospects of peace, and the rising living standards of an industrial society, but above all, perhaps, it brought hope, a hope in ever-greater progress that lifted the mass of mankind out of its age-old sink of stagnation and despair."

Opposing the dominance of Power over all of human life, these Classical Liberal Revolutions defended the natural rights of human beings to life, liberty and property. Freedom of thought, speech and press were born, and the partial establishment of religious freedom and tolerance finally brought

an end to centuries of religious warfare.

In opposition to the remnants of feudalism and the systems of mercantalism and monopoly privilege of their time, the Classical Liberal radicals fought for the birth of the unhampered 'market economy,' the society of peaceful production and exchange, over the 'political economy,' the economy controlled by the State apparatus and its henchmen. They fought for the abolition of caste and privilege, for an extension of the rights of property, which would give people as individuals title to the products of their own labor, and for what they could obtain for that labor on the unhampered market. They fought against oppressive taxation and against the vicious system of protective tariffs.

Finally, they were unbridled champions of international peace and international free trade. They sought to destroy mercantilism, a system which restricted production and exchange in order to benefit a class privileged by State Power. They fought against militarism, colonialism, and imperialism.

The Classical Liberal movement was nothing less than a revolution waged against Power by the forces of Liberty, partially establishing the unregulated free-market 'social economy' over the statist, restrictionist

'political economy.' The great British Classical Liberal, Lord Acton, referred to it as the 'revolution in permanence,' the giving of precedence to 'what ought to be' over 'what is.' Acton saw the history of liberty as nearly identical with the history of revolution.

It was, in short, a glorious tradition which died politically only with the onslaught and slaughter of the First World War, which destroyed so much of what was valuable in the West. Intellectually, it is a tradition still alive, stretching from John Locke in the 17th century to such figures as Nobel Laureate F.A. Hayek in our own time. It was the tradition represented, in their different ways, by Adam Smith, Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson and Wilhelm von Humboldt. It was the tradition of Benjamin Constant, Charles Comte, Charles Dunoyer and Frederic Bastiat in France; of Cobden and Bright, John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer in Britain; and William Lloyd Garrison, William Graham Sumner, Albert Jay Nock and a great many others in America.

It was, alas, a tradition which never fully triumphed anywhere, a revolution which remained an incomplete revolution, touching only America

and Western European society.

This tradition of Liberty has been reborn today with the birth of the radical Libertarian Movement, which once again urges the revolution of Liberty against Power, which once more urges the giving of precedence in politics to 'what ought to be' over 'what is.' It is today the Libertarian Movement which brings hope to the peoples of the world, peoples conquered by Power. It is the Libertarian Movement which once again raises the standard of Liberty to which all can repair.

If, then, Libertarianism is the politics of 'what ought to be,' irrespective of 'what is,' what are its doctrines? What does this vitally alive and important new movement hold out as ideals not merely for America, but for all the world?

The doctrine of Libertarianism begins with the principle of inviolable individualism, with the view that all human beings are the sole legitimate owners of their own lives, free to do whatever they wish, so long as they do not use force, violence, aggression or fraud against the person or justly held property of another. Only individuals exist in the world; terms such as 'nation,' 'state,' 'society,' and the like are nothing but metaphorical constructs designed to reflect real relationships between actual individual human beings, who alone feel, think, have needs and act to fulfill them. Libertarianism, then, is based squarely on what used to be called the tradition of natural rights, holding that every human being has the right to life, liberty and justly acquired property—property acquired by transforming unowned natural resources by their own effort or by engaging in peaceful exchange of their own thought and labor for that of others. The foremost social principle of Libertarianism follows squarely from this—the principle that no one may use violence or aggression against the person or justly-held property of another, the principle of non-aggression.

By holding firm to these principles, Libertarians propose to liberate human beings from all forms of bondage, from all forms of involuntary social relations. For these rights are based on nothing less than human nature and needs in a social context. If human beings are to survive and prosper, they need to use their minds and capacities to fulfill their own needs in society, to achieve those things without which their lives would

have little meaning or dignity.

Libertarians stand opposed to Power in lauding the natural right of all human beings to choose the course of their own lives, and to accept that fundamental, unquestionable responsibility for the consequences of their choices and actions. Any attempt to impose conformity on human beings through political means is an attempt to destroy what it is that makes them essentially and gloriously human.

Thus, a basic humanism requires of us that we champion and defend a social system which fully respects the individuality and diversity of human beings, a society based on the twin axioms of self-ownership and nonaggression, a society wherein all social relationships are voluntary and uncoerced, where no one may compel anyone else to obey him. Every human life is to be regarded as an end-in-itself, never merely as a means. The only way to implement these principles is through a structure of voluntary social relations, resting on consent and agreement, reason and persuasion, where no one is subjugated to the will of another.

Libertarianism offers nothing less than the completion of the Revolution of Liberty against Power, carrying on the grand traditions of Classical Liberalism to their infinitely radical conclusions—the dismantling of all systems of Power and Privilege. It proposes to end the exploitation of some groups by others by ending the power of the State to grant special privileges to some at the expense of others. It proposes to end the power of government to pursue aggressive foreign policies and to wage wars aimed at aggrandizement, empire or glory.

In practical terms, Libertarians propose to set in motion the process of de-politicizing America, to begin dismantling the Leviathan State at home and abroad, to reassert individual responsibility and to restore to the people

individual control over their own lives.

Domestically, this means the establishment of the free market, the elimination of victimless crime laws and full restoration of civil liberties to the American people. It means an end to government spying and robbery, to the CIA and IRS. It means the elimination of laws regulating sexual relationships between consenting adults, laws against pornography and an end to the dangerous and vicious prohibition of drugs of all kinds, which simply leads to violence and the destruction of individual lives. We seek the elimination of wage and price controls in all their forms, which cause shortages and unemployment, the ending of government regulatory agencies and of government-fostered cartels, which restrict production, limit alternatives, and raise prices. We seek the elimination of occupational licencure, which prevents individuals from working in whatever trade they wish, and of all other restrictions on freedom of employment. We despise the system of forced retirement, which robs the elderly of work, dignity, and purpose. We advocate the dismantling of the system of compulsory State education, its replacement with a network of diverse, voluntary educational institutions, and the ending of government brainwashing and enslavement of American children. We propose to end the corruption and bribery of government officials by abolishing their ability to dispense special privileges. We

advocate ending the monopoly power of 'public utilities,' their power to control significant areas of human needs, and to place the fulfillment of these needs fully within the voluntary, 'social economy.' We intend to abolish the government-fostered cartel of central banking, to abolish government control of the money supply, and thus to end those inflationary policies which erode pensions and savings and lead to the cruel distortions of the business cycle. In short, by ending incentives to parasitism and restrictions on production, we promote the ideal of a society of independent, productive human beings and aim to set loose the forces of the productive free market in expanding and enriching our standard of living and the quality of our lives in society.

In foreign affairs, we mean to establish isolationism and the reign of free trade, to end American imperialism and involvement in the affairs of other nations, whether done in the name of alleged 'anti-communism,' of guaranteeing American access to raw materials or foreign markets or in the name of protecting American investments in foreign countries. We mean to erase politically constructed national boundaries and bring to human beings the liberty to travel and trade where they will, at their own expense and risk. But most of all, we propose to abolish the age-old scourges of militarism and war, by abolishing the powers of governments all over the world to conscript, loot and kill. Nothing has ever excused the horror of mass murder and nothing ever will.

Finally, the implications of principles so grand as those of Libertarianism cannot be limited to any one nation, not even one so potentially great as America. The system of Liberty which applies to America has even greater implications for the rest of the peoples of the world. For we mean not mere 'national self-determination,' a metaphorical cloak for the tyranny of some

over others, but *individual liberty*, for all the peoples of the world.

Western Europe must see the dismantling of systems of 'state capitalism,' of 'social democracy.' The Third World must see the dismantling of the remains of feudalism, serfdom and mercantilism. We lend our support to those liberation movements seeking, not forms of State Socialism, or Power, but forms of Liberty. For the Communist world, we advocate the dismantling of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of national socialism and central planning. We seek an end to the suppression of civil liberties, the full restoration of individual economic freedom. We advocate the liberation of individuals in communist countries from the monopoly control of the State apparatus over the means of production. For America, we offer nothing less than the completion of the ideals of the American revolution.

We intend, in short, not to establish another form of Power over human beings, but to give individuals full liberty to live their own lives in com-

munities of peace and voluntary social relations.

Moved by a passion for justice, by compassion for the oppressed peoples of America and the world, we are the voice of Liberty against Power. In this period of human history, no ideal could be more important nor press its claim with greater urgency. No ideal could be a more noble or radical challenge to the politics of death and despair—the politics of our age. We shall take up the banner of Liberty, and with it, fulfill the ancient dream of peace and prosperity for all the peoples of the world.

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